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OUT ARTIST  
*Seroya*

TALKS WITH EXP

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## cover story

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Don't be fooled. With her composed demeanor, clean-cut yet savvy edge and cherub-like 5-foot-2-inch frame, any lesbian would be proud to take her home to meet the parents. Little would they know that she's a chart-topping electronic music powerhouse who ignites dance floors around the world.

Seroya, like her music, is a powerful blend of many influences. Her music's electric and this girl's eclectic.

With hard-hitting beats, haunting vocals and luscious electronic textures, Washington, DC-based artist Seroya (the musical moniker for Sally Hamidi) has returned with her much-anticipated sophomore effort, *Eat the Flowers*.

You may not have picked up on who she is from her first full-length album. It's more likely you've shaken your moneymaker on a dance floor to her sultry vocals on the 2003 Billboard #1 dance single "Only Your Love," as remixed by fellow Washingtonians Deep Dish. Her soft, siren-like voice has been known to rock a few bedrooms as well as the local discotheque.

Trained on the Setar (a Persian lute instrument) from age 7, Hamidi began to study classical Western music upon moving from Tehran, Iran, to Washington in 1986. Her early influences and favorites include Shostakovich, Depeche Mode, Madonna and Rick James.

She later focused on music composition as well as piano performance at Catholic University. A stint at New York University to study film music was the last dis-

## Up Close & Personal with Seroya

heartening straw with academia as she found it stifling and uninspiring.

She turned to the real estate industry to make a living, but couldn't stay away from music. In 1999, she began collaborating with friends such as DJ Holmes Ives and co-producer Don Bosse, who now appear on her self-owned Zan Records label, and became fascinated with the technology of electronic music.

"I find that the possibilities are endless within the electronic format," Hamidi says. "I'm especially intrigued by the freedom it gives you to explore 'sound.' It's also extremely adaptive in that organic instruments also have a place in this medium, including the human voice."

Since releasing her debut full-length album, *Mystic Maah*, in 2000, Seroya has garnered very well-deserved acclaim. In the past five years, she has been included in several dance compilations such as John Digweed's *Bedrock*, *Renaissance* and *Ministry of Sound*.

Wanting this album to reflect more of her mindset than the first, Hamidi wrote all tracks and played most instrumentation on the new album. Song inspirations range from her traumatic childhood seeing her hometown in Iran bombed during the Iran/Iraq War, immigrating to and living in the United States, relationship dynamics and even lust for a local stripper.

For example, the up-tempo lead track, "Are You Ready For

Me?," is drawn from her passion for human rights, while other songs such as "Talk to Me" speaks softly of longing for an unrequited love (although the rhythm makes it ripe for a hot remix).

Oh yeah, and that song about infatuation for a stripper? That would be "Beautiful," which recently became the first single released from *Eat the Flowers*. The track was remixed by the renowned DJ Noel Sanger and was picked up for release and distribution by Armada Music, the record label owned by prominent electronic artist Armin Van Buuren.

Seroya's sound showcases Hamidi's evolving affection for the art form and mastery of her instruments is evident in the rich landscape of her compositions.

Lyrically, her songs are not as crowded as dance-pop or bubblegum, and not void as a predictable trance record. Music lovers can tell that Hamidi took time to think about the structure and the experience of listening to her works...the quality that distinguishes a cook from a chef, a garage worker from a mechanic, a musician from an artist...an element that is very refreshing and commonly absent nowadays.

Hamidi's music career is just burgeoning, but with her infectious bubbly, thoughtful personality she humbly reflects on her success thus far.

"Women where I'm from (Iran) would never have the opportunity to do what I'm doing" she said. "I'm very appreciative of the opportunities I've had. My hope is to spread 'music with a positive message' to appeal to all walks of life regardless of political beliefs or socio-economic backgrounds."

Positive messages included, you can hear the album and the recently-released Noel Sanger remix version of "Beautiful" on the Zan Records Web site ([www.zan-records.com](http://www.zan-records.com)) or on iTunes. A portion of all proceeds from album sales will be donated to the Tahirih Justice Center, an organization that helps protect women's rights around the globe. Hamidi also plans to tour the east coast of the United States later this year, and ultimately assemble an all-female tour of electronic artists. ▼



Seroya